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TEACHING ANIMAL ETHICS IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE SETTINGS

by

Julie Knopp

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of  
Master of Arts in Teaching

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This project explores the research question “How can we teach compassion for animals in a culturally responsive manner?” The premise stems from the contrast of the narrow range of values taught in public schools and the growing cultural diversity of our students. Literature in moral development theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, and humane education suggested that the most effective values education invites students to think critically. By providing information, modeling, and supports for ethical decision-making, students develop a greater sense of moral integrity, while simultaneously developing essential academic skills. The result of this project is a unit promoting critical thinking about human relationships to non-human animals and considering how this relationship changes depending on culture and context. Students are invited to share about their family’s and culture’s relationship to animals and consider whether they believe non-human animals warrant our consideration and compassion. The project concludes with the author’s reflections on the process of producing the project artifact, including the limitations and implications. The author examines the project’s relationship to the HSE conceptual framework, including promoting equity, building communities of teachers and learners, constructing knowledge, and practicing thoughtful inquiry and reflection.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

### **Background**

Values are the beliefs that inform our behavior throughout our lives. We hold these concepts in high esteem. They often dictate our choices, the people we choose to be, and even the careers we might choose. Our values, some might argue, determine the course of our lives.

I have been working in education for more than five years. As a kindergarten teacher, my job is to ensure that the young people who come through my classroom have the ability to succeed in whatever college or career they may pursue later on. As they grow in our school, whether we know it or not, we are teaching them values and beliefs. Our classrooms teach students how to treat themselves, how to treat others, and so much more.

Some students come away from their K-12 education to find that it heavily influenced their character and career. Others leave it behind and pursue paths very different from what their teachers – or even the students themselves – would have hoped. This capstone project will offer a curriculum that speaks to the question: *How can we compassion for animals in a culturally responsive manner?* This capstone aims to offer a starting point for teaching values in a way that honors the diverse viewpoints about compassion that come into our classrooms.

### **Values & Beliefs**

In one of my first jobs, I worked for an after school program for K-5 students in Minneapolis public schools. During my first few days on the job, I observed two second graders talking during a free play period. One student asked the other, “Do you believe in God?” He replied, “I don’t know. My mom hasn’t told me yet.” After a good laugh, I realized that this student had made an insightful point about his belief acquisition. Indeed, our parents and other role models in our lives play a significant role in our development of beliefs and values.

My parents were especially crucial in my values acquisition. In elementary school, my dad would take me out to lunch about once per week during the school day. He worked a lot, so it was a special opportunity to spend one-on-one time with him. He would often write out a saying or quote on a napkin, like “Success comes in cans not in cannots.” Usually the quote related to perseverance, determination, and commitment to helping make the world a better place. He would talk a bit about the subject and ask me to keep the napkin. I could tell by the way he talked about the topics that he considered this to be something important to him..

I have always had an interest in beliefs and values. Growing up in an upper-middle class Catholic neighborhood in St. Paul, the religious element of our community puzzled and fascinated me from an early age. Religion was a subject that was almost never candidly spoken about, but always silently present. Our faith was supposedly our hope and our salvation, but to me, our masses and prayers seemed rote and passive. The most memorable and influential conversations of my young life were those that involved an almost stigmatized kind of discussion—candid exchanges of ideas

about our faith—because they served as rare glimpses into the truest beliefs of the people I interacted with everyday.

Later, during my senior year at Kalamazoo College in Michigan, I completed a thesis entitled *God Concepts and Social Class: The Impact of the Evangelical Movement*. Through dozens of semi-structured interviews and extensive field observation of white Protestants of different social classes, I examined how socioeconomic status impacts our religious belief and how the mega church evangelical movement was shifting those norms. Learning about people's deeply held beliefs and how they were formed was a fascinating endeavor for me. Why and how we believe what we do continues to fascinate me today, especially as I play a role in young children's lives.

### **Crossing Cultures**

My interest in values and beliefs informed my passion for cross-cultural learning and culturally-responsive teaching. In college, I studied abroad for a semester in Thailand and a semester on the U.S.-Mexico border. For my program on the border, I took classes on both sides of the line, I had an internship in El Paso, Texas, and I lived with a family in Juarez, Mexico. Juarez and El Paso are similar to the Twin Cities in the sense that they're just a couple of minutes apart, but an international border separates them. I spent a good deal of my time in Southern El Paso, a community composed of more than 95% Mexican and Mexican American residents, and I was shocked to find a totally different face of my country. The experience of being in Southern El Paso was very similar to being in Juarez. As you walk down the street, you're surrounded by images of the Virgin of Guadalupe and traditional Mexican music. In Southern El Paso, like in Juarez, people



called me “guera,” or white girl. I had expected to feel like a foreigner in Thailand, but I hadn’t expected to feel that way in Texas. El Paso looked and felt nothing like the United States that I knew.

Ultimately, I found being in Texas a more transformative experience than being in Thailand. And I started to wonder what untapped potential we have for intercultural learning and dialogue right in our own backyards. In response, when I moved back to Minnesota, I developed a non-profit organization called City Stay. City Stay provides experiential education that breaks down barriers and sparks unlikely connections between the diverse cultural communities of the Twin Cities. In practice, City Stay invites Minnesotan students of all colors and creeds to live with a new Minnesotan family in the Somali, Hmong, or Latino community. Our primary program lasts one week and is available to high school students. During the day, students teach one another about what they are learning in their respective homestays, in addition to visiting important cultural sites and engaging with community leaders. Topics include urban studies, immigration, and the cultures of the Twin Cities. In the evening, students live with a local family from another culture. Minnesota students of all backgrounds build meaningful and informative relationships with carefully matched local families in Minnesota’s largest immigrant communities. Similar to my experience on the border, City Stay has provided students with opportunities to rethink the American experience.

As I continued to learn about our local diversity through managing City Stay, I obtained my teaching license. I was interested in fusing my interest in cross-cultural learning and teaching in my primary job as well. So I completed my student teaching in a

dual language school and accepted a full-time position there for the following school year.

Working in a diverse linguistic and cultural environment, I see a need for more cultural relevance in the curriculum and diversity awareness amongst staff. Working in a dual language immersion program, in which we support students in becoming fully bicultural, it is essential that we model cultural competency. Lack of sensitivity to cultural diversity within our school can result in the unintended silencing of groups and individuals. Some teachers may not feel comfortable sharing their ideas or perspectives amongst a staff that shows little understanding or openness to their culture. Some students may not invest themselves in their studies when they cannot see their culture or community reflected in the classroom curriculum. The impact of culturally uninformed teaching staff in diverse schools is extensive and complex.

Some staff lack previous exposure to culture groups beyond their own. Others come from foreign countries where a more homogeneous environment results in less awareness of racial discrimination or stereotyping. On one occasion, several foreign staff members dressed up in white face make-up for Chinese New Year. They had no idea how hurtful this would be to some of our Asian families and students. This is just one example of a larger concern. Building an accessible, bilingual-friendly, and culturally responsive curriculum will provide more meaningful learning opportunities for students and staff alike.

This concern is exacerbated by the contrast of teacher and student demographics. While approximately half of our nation's public school students are people of color,

approximately 80% of our teaching force is made up of white women (Howard, 2003; Rich, 2015). This imbalance results in the perpetuation of systemic forms of injustice that marginalize our students of color and limited resources. The dominant culture of the decision-makers -- teachers and administrators -- often leads to reduced visibility of student cultures and histories in the classroom. Implicit bias has resulted in above average referral rates of students of color for remedial programs and below average rates of referral to gifted and talented programs (Howard, 2003). The often unexamined privilege of much of our teacher force leads to a marginalization of the values and cultures of many of our students. Their literature, beliefs, and experiences are too often not reflected by the curriculum and teachers in their K-12 schooling. Erin T. Miller (2010), a former classroom teacher and current teacher training educator, reflected upon her research:

It was a classic case of hegemony—my values were imposed on the students I taught as being the best values to have. I assumed they would benefit all of my students while failing to see they merely protected my own position of privilege. And, because the cultural capital of my students did not match what the school rewarded, I failed to see that my students were up against odds before the first day they entered into our educational institution. (p. 6)

Miller is one of many teachers who saw her students' families with a deficit mentality. In recognition of these concerns, my capstone project invites the richness of students' home cultures into the classroom and applies values education with a critical lens.

### **Animals**

I have always loved animals. As a child, my parents believed I would become a

veterinarian. When I was thirteen, I learned about conditions in factory farms through a class project, and I became a vegetarian, believing that challenging the mass suffering and killing of animals was more important than my dietary habits. Later, as a kindergarten teacher, I found great pleasure in observing my students' innate attitudes of compassion for animals. They go above and beyond to protect an ant crossing the sidewalk or to rescue a spider from our bathroom. When animals visit our classroom, even the loudest and most active students become quiet and still, wanting the animal to feel safe and comfortable. This has almost never been something I needed to teach, regardless of the cultural background of my student.

In recent years, I have become more involved in humane education, a discipline that promotes empathy and understanding of the need for compassion and respect for people, animals, and the environment and recognizing the connection among these. I am in the process of earning a certification as a humane educator from the Humane Society of the United States, and I have worked as a humane educator over the summers for the Animal Humane Society. This capstone project will culminate in a curriculum that will allow me to leverage my experience as a humane educator to promote culturally-responsive character building and standards-aligned lessons for my students and the students of my teammates. At the same time, it will allow me to leverage my experience as a classroom teacher to support initiatives in humane education outside of my school at the Animal Humane Society and local farm sanctuaries.

### **Cultural Relativism**

Values are highly nuanced and subjective. There are countless local examples of

cultural differences in values and beliefs. For instance, looking locally, our city is home to a large Hmong community. Many Hmong people believe in the power of animal sacrifice to commemorate important occasions and to heal. Some would argue that this tradition is a central piece of Hmong identity (Fadiman, 1997). As a White American, I know many people in my cultural community who view this as unnecessary slaughter of sentient beings and have no frame of reference for this practice's meaning. Clearly, there are two very different sets of values about the role animals play in our lives. Another example could be made with different values between different local communities. With increasing levels of racial and cultural diversity in our schools, should we still be teaching the same values we have in the past? Do all of our families share these values? Despite the diversity in our schools, our predominantly white teaching force and administration continue to select and project values that reflect their experience and community, and not that of the students who populate their classrooms.

Most academics and educational leaders agree that some values education is critical to safe classrooms and strong students. In a previous job, I worked with the dean of students to manage behavior problems throughout the school. Often, when fights would break out, the student would say: "My mom always tells me: 'If someone hits you, hit back.'" I would call the mom to report the fight, and indeed, the mom would be upset with me, not the student. Parents would often reiterate that they teach their child to fight back if there is ever a threat put upon them. There's a clear logic to this position, even though it differs from my belief. However, if all of our students embrace this attitude within the walls of our building, our schools will be chaotic. Some values education

ensures the safety of our students.

Still, teaching values is arguably less straightforward than teaching the letters of the alphabet. Character education may feel like an overwhelming or intimidating task to many teachers. How do we measure success? How do we know a student has mastered something as abstract as a value? When each of our students comes from a unique cultural, racial, and socioeconomic background, how can we know which values would be most appropriate to model or reinforce? All of these questions make character education a topic that requires ongoing and in depth research. Values education is not a one size fits all model. Every community holds unique values and must consider a unique approach to values education based on the input of their stakeholders.

I've noticed that children in early education who span many different cultures tend to prioritize kindness to animals. For many, this compassion dissipates as they assimilate to the broader culture over the course of their education. I believe a curriculum focused on drawing out children's innate compassion for animals builds a bridge between the diverse cultures of our classrooms. Administrators, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders often have a vision of what they want for their children. We rarely offer spaces that draw out and foster students' intrinsic beliefs. As part of our role in supporting student development, we must go beyond academics and cultivate our students' character.

In recent years, emotional intelligence has become a hot topic (Dweck, 2009). There was a marked flip-flop in our society's attitudes towards social and soft skills. Previously, intelligence was thought to be the leading factor in determining an

individual's professional success. Then, suddenly, the spotlight shifted. New research revealed that emotional intelligence plays a significant role, perhaps even the predominant role, in achieving success in life. More recently, grit has gained attention in the field of education (Duckworth 2016; Dweck, 2009). Where talent was thought to be the most important factor before, new research has suggested that grit may be equally if not more important in determining achievement. These developments speak to the importance of values, beliefs that often overlap with both themes of emotional intelligence.

It is worth noting that the teaching of grit has fielded criticism for cultural bias. Critics like Strauss (2016) and Denby (2016) suggest that many low-resource students do not benefit from this instruction, since their life outside of school has forced them to develop this perseverance. Instead, teaching grit primarily benefits more privileged students who have rarely encountered hardship. Other critics suggest that if grit is taught as a trait for success which stems from persevering through hardship, the solution to poverty is keeping the poor in poverty. Strauss (2016) writes:

Grit it is an eminently useful concept, but not because it can help the prospects of disadvantaged students. Instead, it helps middle and upper-class adults explain and counteract the shortcomings of their own children, and it also helps them put off the sacrifices that could break down the American caste system (Paragraph 15).

Ignoring the history and context of successful groups and individuals denies the reality of our society and perpetuates harmful assumptions about poverty.

**Purpose of the Project**

The results of this study will help me in my own practice, as well as my teammates' instruction. My district does not have a set curriculum, and my school has a high rate of staff turnover. This means we often struggle to reinvent our curriculum from year to year. Some classrooms apply Second Step for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), but it does not align with the standards we are instructed to teach. It also does not fit into the minutes we are told to spend on each content area every day. By writing a curriculum designed to foster compassion for animals, I will be able to weave the content in with social studies and science standards for kindergarten. My team will be able to use this curriculum to enrich our instruction about animals, a central piece of kindergarten science instruction. Meanwhile, it will support our character education, as research suggests that teaching compassion for animals promotes compassion for humans, as I will explore in my literature review in the next chapter.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed my interest in a capstone project providing a culturally-responsive curriculum examining issues of compassion for all animals. I believe the outcomes of this research will serve the stakeholders involved in my educational community by providing them with the tools to support their students' character and academic development while still respecting plurality in the classroom. I have explained the evolution of my interest in and knowledge about the topic of values, animals, and culturally relevant instruction.

In the next chapter, I will review a range of literature in this field. Specifically, I



will explore the research related to culturally relevant instruction, the idea of respect and compassion for others, and values/character education. Drawing on articles, books, videos and more, I will bring together relevant information to inform the research concept, offering a curriculum for teaching compassion with a culturally-responsive model in a kindergarten setting.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

In recent years, values education and culturally relevant instruction have risen to prominence in the field of education. In some places, they have become standards of effective teaching. However, in most school communities, they linger in break room conversation and occasion professional development sessions (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Either way, exploring and expanding the research in these fields is essential in order to better instruct our children in issues of character in culturally relevant ways. Throughout the course of this chapter, these topics will intertwine and provide a useful framework for the question: “How can we teach compassion for animals in a culturally responsive manner?”

This chapter will examine three subtopics relevant to this capstone: values development, culturally relevant pedagogy and concepts of compassion. The beginning of this literature review will define values education. Specific emphasis will be placed on the developmental and transmissions theories of values acquisition. Literature on the conditions conducive to effective values instruction will also be considered.

The second section focuses on culturally relevant instruction. The content will include the theory behind culturally relevant instruction and some of the strategies employed to carry it out. The bulk of this section will center on the common characteristics found in culturally responsive teachers and classrooms. This component is

essential for responsibly teaching about values in diverse classrooms.

The final section examines the concept of respect for people and animals. I will explore research in humane education, a field promoting compassion for humans, animals, and the environment. Specifically, I will address issues pertaining to moral education vs. indoctrination and children's attitudes towards animals. These findings will shed light on the complexities of teaching values of compassion for animals within a community that holds diverse viewpoints on this topic.

### **Values Education**

Central to this research question is the concept of values. Values are “the vital common beliefs that shape human relations in each culture” (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 5). Values are sometimes considered “structural guides” or “orientations” for our experience in the world (Silcock & Duncan, 2001, p. 243). These principles inform our behavior, our interactions, and our daily lives.

The purpose of education has often been considered the shaping and forming of our youth. Silcock & Duncan (2001) wrote, “Teaching values is crucial to the whole educational enterprise... We will wish [values] to be consciously internalized, personally and culturally sanctioned guides to action” (p. 243). Many other scholars agree that values instruction is central to the work of teaching. James Arthur (2013) writes, “The formation of character could be said to be the aim that all general education has historically set out to achieve” (p. 12). Teaching strategically about values and character has become a priority in K-12 schools. Even the U.S. Department of Education has addressed character education, defining it as a process that “enables students and adults in

a school community to understand, care about and act on core ethical values such as respect, justice, civic virtue and citizenship, and responsibility for self and others” (2017, paragraph 1). “Values education” or “character education” – two terms that I will use interchangeably in this paper – aim to impart our beliefs about behavior to our children through intentional instruction.

There are two central theories in the field of values education. The first is known as the developmental approach, proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg (1981). Inspired by Piaget, Kohlberg (1981) suggests that individuals benefit from opportunities to control their impulses in order to better develop their sense of character in their community. Individual mental health, internal loci of control, and recognition of choices are central to this theory. Emphasizing that values are subjective and situational, Kohlberg takes an optimistic look at human nature, believing each individual must draw their own ethical conclusion based on experience and context. Herman agrees that these opportunities are crucial to a healthy community. Echoing Kohlberg, Herman (1997) summarizes the developmental theory: “People need the opportunity to learn how to think and act responsibly in order to control their own behavior in a democratic society” (p. 1).

In Kohlberg’s (1981) theory, individuals progress through six hierarchical stages throughout the course of their lives, beginning with a punishment-reward orientation and progressing towards a critical ethical consciousness. These stages can be grouped into three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. In the first, pre-conventional, individuals progress through the obedience and punishment orientation, as well as the self-interest orientation. At this level, children consider how they can avoid

punishments and earn rewards. In the second level, conventional, people advance to interpersonal accord and conformity, in which they develop an awareness of social norms. The second stage at this level is authority and social order maintaining orientation, in which people see morality in terms of law and order. At the final level, post-conventional, individuals progress to social contract orientation and then to universal ethical principles. Both of these stages imply a principled conscious. Kohlberg's work is consistent with the work of other theorists and researchers, including Rogers, 1964, 1969, 1983; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Kirschenbaum, 1977; Simon, Howe, & Kirschenbaum, 1972, and many more.

On the other hand, the transmission approach, led by scholar E. A. Wynne (1986), suggests that the community is responsible for reiterating values to all members of the society. Wynne proposes an approach that promotes moral literacy and indoctrination of youth into the desired moral character of the community. In other words, Wynne argues that strong external forces are sometimes necessary in cultivating a moral society. He wrote that "On the whole, school is and should and must be inherently indoctrinative... Without effective moral formation, the human propensity for selfishness---or simply the advancement of self-interest--can destructively affect adult institutions" (p. 9). As a result, there must be certain limits on our personal moral development in order to maintain a safe and functional community. In the transmission theory, the individual is passively indoctrinated into the behavioral and ethical expectations; behavioral outcomes are more important than ethical process.

Wynne's transmission theory is consistent with research identifying modeling as a

critical piece of social learning. Bandura (1977) described the impact of modeling in the development of youth character, suggesting children must have behavior explained and modeled so they can understand behavior expectations. Bandura argues that students observe the behavior of others and evaluate different situations to determine which observed behaviors might belong.

There are a number of differences and some similarities amongst these approaches. The developmental and transmission approaches share implied beliefs about the need for behavioral controls in our society. The differences between these approaches run deeper. Kohlberg's (1981) developmental approach emphasizes the development of an internal locus of control. It promotes mental health and balance between the different arenas of our lives. Individual choices and experience dictate moral development. In contrast, Wynne's (1986) transmission approach focuses on external forces. It suggests that systems, such as rewards and punishment, are helpful in controlling our society and preventing conflict. Kohlberg's emphasis of rewards and punishment differs significantly. In Kohlberg's theory, a reward-punishment orientation is a stage that most individuals move past in the course of their ethical development in youth. The developmental approach requires the active engagement of the individual, whereas the transmission approach requires only passive participation for acquiring values.

Herman (1997) suggested that an integration of these two schools of thought provides the healthiest and most manageable system for values acquisition. He argued that young children are highly susceptible to the central elements of Wynne's theory, such as modeling and reinforcement. They are inclined to cast aside their own thinking in

exchange for external reward. As they advance to adolescence and adulthood, their intellectual development allows them to engage an internal assessment of these broader moral systems. With an early foundation in external forces and later critical thought about moral systems, individuals are able to strike a healthy balance in their relationship to established norms and their own belief.

**Conditions for Values Education.** Supported by other theorists, Silcock and Duncan (2001) argue that there are three basic conditions necessary for effective values and character instruction in modern schools. First, effective moral education requires active student engagement with the broader topic. Silcock and Duncan write: “Optimal conditions for the integration of values into school-students’ lives will include the students’ voluntary commitments” (p.242). In other words, student buy-in is critical to meaningful instruction regarding values.

Second, they suggest there must be a direct and observable impact of this instruction. Students will only internalize the teachings if they see change in their lives, their relationships, or their studies as a result of character or values content. Silcock and Duncan write: “Values learning must lead to personally transformed relationships between students and topics considered worthwhile” (p. 242). Put simply, students must see results in their lives.

Silcock and Duncan also make note of the issue of consistency. If the values taught are not reflected by the larger cultural landscape, inconsistencies may create instability in the sense of character instructed in schools. They write, “Since values learning is arguably the core of formal education there has to be some consistency

between what is learned and the wider socio-political scene” (p.242). This brings us to the crux of their argument. Silcock and Duncan suggest that the current educational attitudes often prevent effective character education. In other words, emphasis on teach-to-the-test mentalities limits educators’ ability to create environments conducive to character education.

The research on values acquisition is broad and varied. However, one thing remains clear, students acquire values from a range of sources: personal experience, direct instruction, observation, modeling, etc. Values education in our schools requires certain circumstances and conditions, which are not always present in our modern classrooms. The above research implies the classroom environment, teachers, peers, and direct instruction play a significant role in values acquisition. This lends itself to the relevance of the research project offering a kindergarten curriculum teaching compassion for animals within the context of the standards.

One of the most complicating factors in values education is culturally relevant instruction. How can we effectively teach character in diverse classrooms, when good character is often defined differently between cultures? The next section will define culturally relevant instruction and lay out some of its essential qualities. This will provide a frame for considering how values can be taught in culturally sensitive ways.

### **Culturally Relevant Instruction**

The educational community has noted an inconsistency in our urban public schools known as the demographic divide (Howard, 2003). While 83% of our teaching force is white, students of color now compose the majority of the children in our public



schools (Strauss, 2014). For this reason, the research question – which seeks a model for effectively teaching values to culturally diverse student groups – is especially timely. In order to understand the tenets of effectively teaching values in diverse classrooms, we must first understand the essential components of effective teaching in culturally responsive schools.

The opportunity-achievement gap refers to the ways in which race, culture, socioeconomic status and other factors can contribute to lower academic performance and attainment (DaSilva, 2007; Ladson Billings, 1995). Amongst educators, there have been two primary schools of thought in response to the achievement gap. The first school of thought proposes a “color blind” lens, suggesting that by treating all students the same, we resolve any bias (Gay 2010). These educators argue that, with intelligence and hard work, any student can achieve success. Some such educators have applied a standard curriculum in their diverse school systems. As a result, low levels of achievement continued to correlate strongly with students of color (Gay 2010).

In the second school of thought, educators (Conage, 2014; Gay, 2010, Ladson Billings, 1995) have suggested that education is not one size fits all. These narrow instructional methods and standardized curricula cannot effectively serve such a rich diversity of students in our schools. Some academics and educators have proposed alternative methods, like culturally relevant teaching, to boost achievement for our students of color.

Also known as culturally relevant pedagogies or culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant instruction is linked to the development of positive racial identities in

students of color and reductions in the achievement gap (Byrd, 2016). This approach presupposes that quality instruction requires teachers to see their own racial identity and that of their students. Gloria Ladson Billings (2006, p. 37) argues that, “If teachers pretend not to see students’ racial and ethnic differences, they really do not see the students at all and are limited in their ability to meet their educational needs.” Indeed, culturally relevant instruction requires that teachers recognize and respond to racial and cultural diversity in their classroom.

In short, culturally relevant instruction is a teaching method applied to increase achievement and engagement in multicultural settings in order to reduce the opportunity/achievement gap (Byrd, 2016). Students’ cultures are central to content delivery methods, selection of materials, and other aspects of the instructional practice.

Some academics and educators have argued that culturally relevant instruction is simply “good teaching” (Ladson Billings, 2009; Byrd, 2016). After all, this approach emphasizes student-centered instruction and real world experiences, which engage students and provide a reflection of their identity in the classroom. However, these methods of effective instruction are often lacking in classrooms populated by students of color, precisely where students need it most. Ladson Billings (2009) writes:

The negative effects are brought about, for example, by not seeing one’s history, culture, or background represented in the textbook or curriculum or by seeing that history, culture, or background disoriented. Or they may result from the staffing pattern in the school (when all the teachers and the principal are white and only the janitors and cafeteria workers are African-American for example) and from

the tracking of African-American students into the lowest level classes. (p. 19-20)

As a result, the achievement gap persists (Ladson-Billings 2009, Byrd 2016). Scholars propose that true culturally relevant teaching is an important method to reduce achievement gaps and promote positive ethnic-racial identities for students of color.

Several authors have identified the core characteristics of the culturally relevant teacher (Geneva Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Conage, 2014). Ladson Billings (2009) studied teachers who embodied culturally relevant instruction and found they shared a “focus on student learning, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness in their work with African American and Latino students” (p. 157). She established three principles of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP): cultural competence, socio-political consciousness, and academic achievement.

Academic achievement posited that students must develop certain essential skills in literacy, technology, politics, math and interpersonal interaction in order to engage in our democratic society. Like Paolo Freire, Ladson-Billings (2009) wrote that academic achievement implies that students elect to develop and apply their academic skills within the broader scope of their lives. The teacher must empower their students as independent actors with great capacity and influence. In order to do this, teachers must recognize and encourage students’ abilities and areas of interest.

Ladson-Billings (2009) also argued that students’ should develop competence about their own culture in school. She found that very often students found the school environment to be hostile towards their home norms and this reality reduced their interest in academic studies. Ladson-Billings (2009, p. 161) wrote that “Culturally relevant

teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning." For instance, some teachers might use music, home language links, or inviting parents to the classroom in order to bridge the divide between school and home.

Ladson-Billings' (2009) final principle of CRP is critical consciousness. Beyond academic achievement and cultural competence, Ladson Billings believes students that sociopolitical consciousness is key so that students have the toolbox to critique broader cultural norms, values, and institutions that recreate social inequity. In practice, teachers who cultivate critical consciousness engage in analytical thought about the realities they study with their students. Further, teachers and students work together to address these concerns in the community. They might write letters, invite community members to problem solve an issue with them, or apply other creative strategies to address real world problems.

Similarly, Geneva Gay's (2010) renowned framework includes: "(1) designing culturally relevant curriculum, (2) demonstrating cultural caring, (3) building a learning community, (4) focusing on cross-cultural communication, and (5) developing a cultural diversity knowledge base/understanding cultural congruency in the classroom" (p.157). Examining the research more broadly, the qualities depicting the culturally relevant teacher usually include high expectations, an asset-based approach, strong relationships, and building cultural competence / critical consciousness.

**High Expectations.** Common in nearly all frameworks for culturally relevant teaching is high expectations (Conage, 2014; Ladson Billings, 2009; Byrd 2002).

Teachers must maintain a firm belief that all students can achieve success and academic

growth. However, high expectations require more than simply expecting great things from students. It also requires that the teacher clearly state the expectations and provide the necessary scaffolding and support for student success. Furthermore, they must also demonstrate their belief in students by holding each one accountable to high standards of quality in their work. Many studies suggest teachers – knowingly or not – hold lower expectations for students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In order to push back against the achievement gap and negative racial self-image, teachers must hold all students accountable to a high standard of achievement.

**Critical Consciousness.** Critical consciousness is another fundamental piece of culturally responsive instruction. Teachers exercise a critical lens in the classroom and empower their students to think deeply about the world around them. The educators who embody critical consciousness feel a strong sense of responsibility to challenge injustices in the school system and the world at large (Conage, 2014). They challenge their students to examine the social and cultural fabric that informs their daily experience (Ladson Billings, 2009). Culturally relevant instruction is supported by teachers who are willing to confront, not ignore, the realities of the world their students live in. This component requires that teachers continue to educate themselves about the cultures and realities that surround their students. Ongoing professional development is essential to the teacher's ability to serve and understand their students (Ladson Billings, 2009).

**Asset-based Approach.** The asset-based approach is also common amongst culturally relevant instructional frameworks. As described above Ladson-Billings' (2009) study of several effective teachers working in diverse classrooms revealed that

asset-based, culturally-inclusive approach improved outcomes. Based on these findings, she recommended that teachers identify and cultivate strengths in all students. It is essential that teachers see diversity as an asset to their classroom, rather than an obstacle to overcome. The rich cultural and personal heritage of each student provides additional context for learning and growing as a class. Conage (2014) writes that, “Such an asset approach not only affirms and validates Black students, it can build understanding and relevance, increase engagement, and raise learning for all students.” Overall, as we draw out strengths and experiences in multicultural classrooms, we gain yet another tool for effective teaching.

**Strong Relationships.** Strong relationships are another component of culturally relevant instruction (Gay, 2002; Ladson Billings, 2009; Conage, 2016). Strong, healthy student-teacher relationships allow students to feel safe and welcome at school. This in turn promotes attendance and effort. It begs a reminder of the viral words of educator Rita Pierson (2013), “Kids don’t learn from people they don’t like.” Culturally relevant instruction is supported when students know they can count on a teacher when they confront hardship in or out of the classroom. The relationship provides motivation and a sense of well being at school (Conage, 2014). In the end, culturally relevant instruction “is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exist in society” (Ladson Billings, p. 140). The studies and research in this field are based on the underlying assumption that “culturally responsive pedagogy is that diversity is an asset that enriches the learning of all students, not a deficit to overcome” (Stairs, 2007, p. 38). These scholars propose student culture can be

utilized as a vehicle for learning. In order to provide culturally relevant instruction, Ladson Billings (2009, p.147) summarizes the responsibilities of our teachers: “Encourage teachers to look more broadly and carefully at the causes of the behaviors they see, to develop multiple perspectives, and to make a commitment to working with their students, regardless of parental participation (or lack thereof).” Despite these arguments and studies, culturally relevant instruction is absent from daily instruction in most classrooms.

In other words, values education and culturally relevant instruction often exist in our schools in two separate spheres. A troubling inconsistency surfaces; if we provide direct instruction to cultivate certain elements of student character, can our teaching truly be culturally relevant? This point begs for student voice to be a critical piece of values education in our classroom. To consider this point further, the following section examines a narrower field of values instruction: humane education. Through this lens, the reader will better understand the complexities of animal education in diverse classrooms.

### **Humane Education**

Humane education is defined as “encouraging empathy and an understanding for the need for compassion and respect for people, animals, and the environment and recognizing the connection among these” (Itle Clark 2017, p. 4) In other words, this field of education promotes awareness and advocacy around issues of social justice, animal welfare, and environmental preservation. Others have defined humane education more broadly as “an attempt to develop altruism and a sense of compassion in a world where all other pressures are in opposition to it” (Milburn, 1989, p. 74). The many definitions of

humane education share a common goal to promote social change towards a more just and compassionate society for all living things. However you define it, within the scope of humane education exists compassion for animals. Throughout schools and society, there exists a wide range of philosophies about whether or not animals merit our respect or kind treatment. This section of chapter two will explore diverse beliefs about respect, values education versus values indoctrination, and children's attitudes towards animals.

**Views on Respect Across Cultures.** There is limited peer-reviewed research about children's respect for animals across cultures, so this subsection will integrate findings about values of respect for animals, as well as ideas about consideration of fellow humans. Attitudes and ideas about respect for humans vary dramatically across cultures. With growing national diversity, some researchers have found unique patterns of respect amongst different cultural communities. Robert Ausch (2010) analyzed several studies in Puerto Rico as part of his work on the origins of respect and disrespect in different cultural environments. He found that Puerto Rican culture, respect has an important public dimension (Ausch, p. 3, 2010). In other words, behavior is highly dependent on context. Respect towards authority – for instance, parents – is less about meeting consistent behavior expectations and more about the context surrounding a given moment. In public, respect means deferring to parents, following instructions, and so forth; in private, the child's behavior is less restricted and outbursts might not undermine the sentiment of respect towards the parent (Ausch, p. 3, 2010).

Ausch (2010) also examined a part of the Turkish community. He found that, in some parts of Turkey, the concept of respect scarcely extends to the peer group. Respect



to elders is important, whereas same generation disrespect is more easily and quickly forgiven. Peer-to-peer interactions were rarely taken into consideration when examining the quality of respect.

Finally, Ausch (2010) analyzed a different study looking at differences in understandings of respect between U.S. born and China born children. U.S. born children often explained respect in terms of reciprocity (i.e. the golden rule), whereas foreign-born Chinese students defined respect in terms of a larger social order, an essential piece of a strong social fabric. The study suggested that American students defined respect to their teachers in terms of obedience, whereas the Chinese students understood respect to center on fulfillment of duty. Where American students might follow a teacher's orders to earn their favor, Chinese students would be more likely to devote themselves more extensively to their studies as a sign of their admiration. In his analysis, Ausch (2010) writes:

What stands out from all three of the studies mentioned is that with non U.S.-born populations respectful relations have the effect of making sure that social relations go as prescribed while also providing a foundation for broader cultural values.

With the U.S. born, in contrast, respectful relations have a moral voluntarist quality. Furthermore, while most of the conceptions of respect described involve relative authority, this asymmetry in the case of the U.S.-born seems more arbitrary while in the case of the non U.S.-born respect for authority is grounded in a set of complimentary cultural roles and values. (p. 3)

Ausch highlights these points further by assessing the intimate relationships between compliance and respect unique to U.S. culture. As we can see, there are many different

cultural lenses for understanding the meaning and act of respect.

Most importantly, this compilation of studies illustrates the deep-seated differences in the earning of respect and the practice of respect amongst diverse cultural communities. Indeed, as the research question implies, values education is not one size fits all. Instead, it requires a careful evaluation of how principles can be taught in our schools without the degradation of cultures present in our classrooms.

Despite these substantial differences in cultural attitudes about respect, many such beliefs do not manifest in young children. For example, research suggests that children of diverse backgrounds are intrinsically motivated to treat animals with respect and kindness. Extensive interviews, questionnaires, and scenarios facilitated by researchers suggest that children hold strong beliefs about human responsibility to care for animals and promote their well-being (Bjerke et al. 2003; Daly et al. 2006; Eagles & Miuffitt 1990; Fonseca et al. 2011; Kellert 1985; Knight et al. 2004; Phillips & McCulloch 2005; Thompson & Gullon 2003). Humane education efforts inside and outside of the classroom have had some impact on fostering these beliefs and promoting their ongoing development (Itle Clark 2017, p. 17). However, humane education efforts are often not aligned to standards and find little place in the classroom (Itle Clark, 2017, p. 47). This reveals a gap in the available resources for classroom educators. A standards-aligned, culturally-relevant unit focused on animal ethics allows students' to develop critical thinking skills to support their beliefs about animals.

**Education vs. Indoctrination.** Regardless of whether our views on respect are diverse or uniform across age or culture, many scholars suggest all effective character

education requires a strict focus on critical thinking. Richard Paul's (1988) seminal piece *Ethics Without Indoctrination* emphasizes the value of critical thinking in moral development. He writes, "Without scrupulous care, we do no more than pass on to students our own moral incapacities, moral distortions, and closed mindedness" (p. 11). This emphasis on critical thinking in effective moral education, therefore, extends to teachers as well. Paul writes that character education requires that teachers learn to adapt the concepts of critical thinking to the domain of ethical judgment. Teachers must also learn to cultivate skills such as moral humility and integrity, empathy, open-mindedness, and moral courage in our students. In Paul's (1988) words, "These moral traits are compatible with all moral perspectives" (p. 14). Paul points out that this framework makes ethical thinking relevant in all disciplines. When critical reasoning becomes the core of ethical thinking, it is suddenly central to the study of all other subject areas and thus relevant to a standards-based classroom.

Other scholars have come to similar conclusions. John Wilson's (1998) and Lonnie Kliever's (1992) respective studies of moral education and pluralism led them to conclude that critical thinking is the solution to teaching ethics amidst great diversity. Kliever writes, "We must arm our students for making rational choices in the arena of conflicting values and contested laws. We must help them develop the moral excellence which accepts the necessity while challenging the finality of every public moral order including their own" (p. 133). Similar to the critical consciousness recommended by researchers in culturally relevant instruction (Ladson Billings, 2009; Conage, 2014), critical analysis of ethical norms creates greater ethical integrity. Developing strong

critical thinking skills and a moral backbone in our diverse student population are central to scholars' conclusions in humane education and culturally responsive instruction alike.

More recently, David Copp (2016) has expanded the discourse on indoctrination. He argues that moral indoctrination is no more a risk in character education than in science or history. Copp defines indoctrination as follows:

To induce people to believe something *uncritically* – or to *indoctrinate* them in this thing – is to induce people to believe it, where, given its nature, there are or could be epistemic reasons for believing it, but to do so (1) without providing epistemic reasons for believing it, [a] to the extent that presenting such reasons would be pedagogically appropriate, reasons that are [b] epistemically fairly balanced and [c] epistemically cogent, or (2) without addressing any local controversy about it by acknowledging and, to the extent that is appropriate, evaluating the different sides of the controversy. (2006, p. 154)

The core of indoctrination is to will someone to believe something without critical examination. By contrast, education does not aim to change someone's beliefs, but rather to teach topics and cultivate skills for making sense of that information. Therefore, indoctrination may find a place in any classroom where a teacher presents information without room for questioning or tools for critical reflection.

**Outcomes.** A significant body of research suggests that humane education promotes social, emotional, and academic growth for students (Daly & Suggs 2010; Zins et al. 2007). Studies show humane education results in the development of empathy and other important social and emotional behaviors (Beck & Katcher, 1996; McNicholas &

Collis, 2001; Melson, 2001). Specifically, Melson (2001) found that children's relationships with an animal (i.e. classroom or personal pet) promote prosocial behavior and increased empathy for humans and animals. Research also suggests that humane education can promote academic growth as well. Zins et al. (2007) found "considerable evidence that SEL [Social-Emotional Learning] can not only improve students' social development and mental health, but can strengthen their academic achievement" (p. 2). As research accumulates, scholars are increasingly advocating for the inclusion of SEL (such as humane education) in our classroom curriculum in order to raise academic performance and equip students with real-world skills for college and career.

In sum, the literature in humane education and culturally responsive instruction suggested that critical analysis and student empowerment result in improved academic and social-emotional outcomes. Moral theorists confirmed that a variety of sources contribute to ethical development, including modeling, reinforcement, and internal factors (Kohlberg, 1986; Wynne, 1981). These insights have informed the following standards-aligned project: a curriculum that invites critical cultural analysis of the ethics of our relationship to animals. By filling this void in teacher resources, the project promotes cultural competence, moral development, and empowers students as ethical decision makers.

## **Conclusion**

Research indicates that the practices of culturally relevant instruction result in improved outcomes for our students. Culturally relevant strategies, like high expectations, relationship building, and student-centered content are becoming

synonymous with effective teaching. As racial diversity in our schools increases, research suggests that education cannot be administered the same to all students. Instead, content and instructional methods must respond to the cultures present in the classroom towards the aim of shrinking the achievement gap.

Similarly, we have seen that SEL and humane education instruction can improve social and academic outcomes. This chapter specifically explored the concept of respect within the scope of humane education. Studies illustrate the wide range of beliefs about respect and styles of practicing respect in diverse cultures, but also suggest there are more homogenous beliefs about animals amongst children. Humane education embraces a mindfulness of moral education, as opposed to indoctrination. Experts suggest that cultivating critical thinking about ethical reasoning is central to avoiding the trap of indoctrination in values education.

This chapter has also reviewed two different theories of moral development. Wynne's transmissions method is generally involved in the direct instruction and modeling of specific, desirable character traits. Most theorists believe values are acquired from a range of sources, including societal influences, modeling, direct instruction, personal experience, and more. By contrast, Kohlberg's developmental theory focuses on individual opportunities to experiment with moral boundaries and explore ethical decision making. In either theory, certain conditions are more conducive to the adaptation of values, including buy-in to direct instruction and cultural uniformity.

Finally, this chapter has identified how classrooms can be more culturally responsive and the role of values education in our schools. However, few curriculums

fuse these two topics within the scope of the standards. The unit that follows aims to maintain culturally responsive teaching methods while carrying out values specific education aligned to kindergarten standards.

The next chapter of this paper will examine the methods used to carry out this project. It provides a description of the artifact: a standards-aligned kindergarten unit inviting an ethical investigation of our relationship to animals across time and culture. Chapter three will identify the research paradigm, curriculum development method, the intended audience for the project, and the timeline. Specific attention will be devoted to the tenets and application of Understanding by Design, the framework for the curriculum. This project description will provide useful context for understanding the purpose and guiding principles informing the unit that follows.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Project Description**

#### **Introduction**

As an educator, I have concerns that the values I teach in my classroom may not always align with the values of some of my students' families. Our public schools continue to become more diverse, yet the values taught in schools across the United States remain largely the same. At the same time, less and less time is available to explore themes and lessons not directly related to the standards. Teach-to-the-test mentalities leave little room for teaching values, especially those that don't directly relate to greater productivity in the classroom.

Through my personal experiences living in other countries and working in diverse schools, I have observed that some families in the US do not share the same view of respect and compassion as we teach in school. I've seen that some communities prioritize showing respect only when it is earned, while mainstream schools teach that respect is something given equally to all people. The previous chapter explored these themes in more depth, laying out the tenets of culturally relevant instruction, providing strategies to promote values acquisition, and considering the diverse concepts of respect for people and animals across cultures.

In this chapter, I outline the methodologies that I used to create a culturally relevant curriculum that fosters respect for animals. This project was designed to create a curriculum applying culturally responsive strategies for teaching compassion for animals



within the confines of the standards.

### **Research Paradigm**

The design of this curriculum was based on my experience working as a kindergarten teacher and as a humane educator, teaching children about animals through the Animal Humane Society. Through these experiences, I have gathered information about what diverse groups of students think about animals and what they know about animals. I have also learned a great deal about the intellectual capacities of kindergarten children and their developmental skills and knowledge.

### **Curriculum Development Model**

I have chosen to apply Understanding by Design (UbD) to create my curriculum. I have experience working with my kindergarten teaching team to create curriculum with this framework. UbD is a highly flexible model that can be used across subject areas and grade levels. The ultimate goal of UbD is “understanding and the ability to transfer learnings – to appropriately connect, make sense of, and use discrete knowledge and skills in context” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 23). UbD was developed to answer the question, “How do we make it more likely, by our design, that more students really understand what they are asked to learn” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 4)? These objectives match the needs of my curriculum, as I work to foster students’ critical thinking about animals and empower them to advocate for compassion.

UbD applies backwards planning. As the creators remind us, “in the best designs, form follows function” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 14). Teachers begin with an

objective and develop intentional activities based on the identified outcome.

In the context of my unit, the focus on real-world application is critical. Students develop social and emotional skills and an ethic of compassion for animals, which often have the greatest application outside of academic and institutional arenas.

UbD outlines three steps for backwards design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 18 - 19).

- Step 1: Identify Desired Results: In this stage, teachers must name the intended understanding students will gain from the curriculum. This includes the identification of national, state, and/or district standards that set the stage for the unit. In other words, the first step aims to clarify outcomes. For this project, each lesson includes specific state standards and related learning targets. Identifying these academic goals was the first step in my planning process. The primary content standard that weaves through every lesson in the unit is Minnesota State Standard for Language Arts (Speaking) 0.8.1.1 - *Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.*
- Step 2: Determine Acceptable Evidence: This stage invites teachers to consider how they will know if students have achieved the intended results. Before designing any specific lessons or activities, UbD suggests teachers should first think about how they will measure success. For this project, I considered what authentic performance tasks would most clearly

demonstrate whether or not the student had mastered the learning target and related standard. Having a clear sense of the evidence of mastery helped inform the final stage of determining the necessary learning experience to achieve these goals.

- Step 3: Plan Learning Experiences and Instruction: In the last stage, UbD directs teachers to consider the most appropriate lessons and activities to meet their desired results. The model outlines several critical questions that must be asked in this stage:
  - o What enabling knowledge (facts, concepts, principles) and skills (processes, procedures, strategies) will students need in order to perform effectively and achieved desired results?
  - o What activities will equip students with the needed knowledge and skills?
  - o What will need to be taught and coached, and how should it best be taught, in light of performance goals?
  - o What materials and resources are best suited to accomplish these goals?

For this project, I considered the most important knowledge and skills needed to achieve the desired results and how they could best be cultivated in the classroom environment. All activities were designed with these questions in mind.

To reiterate, UbD invites teachers to start with big ideas and questions. This

inquiry-based model allows students to draw conclusions based on their own experience and observations. This approach is central to a culturally-responsive model. Students must be invited to bring their full selves into the classroom and reach their own conclusions. A values lesson with an intended “right answer” could not be effectively applied in a CR classroom.

The specific tenets of CRP that will be applied in my unit are Ladson-Billings’ (2009) three principles: cultural competence, critical consciousness, and academic achievement. Students will be required to develop deeper knowledge about their own culture’s relationship to animals. Throughout the lesson, they will raise their sociopolitical consciousness through critical analysis of humans’ use of animals. Through this analysis and opportunities for real world decision making, students will also be empowered as social change makers. Finally, standards-based tasks for academic achievement will weave throughout each lesson of the unit.

One of the six facets of understanding put forth by Wiggins and McTighe is empathy. These facets provide evidence of understanding to justify students’ findings, as seen in stage two. The central question linked to the “empathy” facet asks whether students can “be sensitive and walk in someone else’s shoes.” These flexible forms of assessment provide a framework for considering evidence in diverse disciplines.

Stage three is particularly well-suited for my curriculum needs. It allows me to take into consideration the immersion element in our environment, classroom diversity, developmental level, and much more to identify activities that will best engage students in reaching the previously identified outcomes.

**Intended Audience**

As mentioned above, the intended audience for this unit are kindergarten students in a classroom or an enrichment environment, as well as their educators. The lessons can be applied to classes of different sizes, although the ideal size would be 16-20 students. The activities have been designed for diverse classes in urban settings. The lessons presuppose that most students are not from a farming background and have had limited exposure to animal agriculture.

The specific audience this curriculum will first be used with is my own school's kindergarten classes. I teach in an inner-ring suburban public school with 449 students. The school specializes in dual language education, as mentioned above. This means that the majority of academic instruction is in Spanish in the lower grades (K-3). The older grades (4-5) split instruction between Spanish and English. The student population is 51% Hispanic and 22% white. Less than 1% of the student population is made up of Asian and African American students. (The remaining portion of the population did not report their race or ethnicity.) Recent data show that 63.55% of students receive free or reduced lunch.

Through careful observation and communication with staff, I have found that the school has a unique linguistic dynamic. Most students come from Spanish speaking homes. However, students usually speak English to one another or select English language books when given the choice between English and Spanish. The students are more comfortable speaking in English, perhaps due to the prevalence of English in our society, the dialect of Spanish spoken at home, or the influence of older siblings or

friends. Most students have limited experience with academic Spanish. I will use this background information to inform my curriculum design by increasing inclusion of visuals, gestures, and explicitly defining terms students might struggle with.

### **Timeline**

This curriculum will be crafted over the summer of 2017, with support from a professor, content reviewer, and peer base group. The curriculum will be finished in August, at which point I will introduce it to my kindergarten team during staff development week. We will integrate this unit within our farm education instruction in the spring of 2018. After I have gathered feedback and modified the curriculum, I will share it with my contacts within humane education groups, including the Animal Humane Society and farm sanctuaries.

### **Summary of Chapter Three**

This chapter has explored the model I have applied to design a curriculum that responds to the question, “How can we teach values of compassion for animals in a culturally responsive manner?” I have applied the Understanding by Design model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) in creating this curriculum, based on my previous experience with this flexible framework. The curriculum applies information gathered from the literature review and contains lessons on critical thinking and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) related to animal behavior, animals’ role in society, and human-animal relationships.

In the next chapter, I will reflect upon the process of producing this project. Specifically, chapter four will explore the limitations and possible implications of this

unit. I will also consider how this project has contributed to my personal growth as an educator and how it might affect the course of my future work. To conclude this paper, I will draw connections between this work and Hamline School of Education's conceptual framework.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Reflection**

#### **Purpose of the Project**

This capstone project sought to explore the intersection of values education and culturally responsive pedagogy. The end product is a unit promoting compassion for animals while applying a lens of cultural awareness. Values education has risen in popularity in recent years, but its narrow scope conflicts with the growing diversity in our nation's public schools. The goal of this capstone was to produce content that approaches values education about animals with mindfulness of the diverse beliefs that students hold. This unit has addressed the question, *How can we teach compassion for animals in a culturally responsive manner?*

#### **Literature Review**

The literature review examined different approaches to values education, including the developmental and transmission theories. Additionally, it explored the concept of humane education, as well as some successes and challenges of this field. Literature in values education and humane education suggested that the most effective values education invites students to think critically (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Paul, 1988; Zins et al. 2007). By providing information, modeling, and supports for ethical decision making, students develop a greater sense of moral integrity, while simultaneously developing essential academic skills. Culturally relevant pedagogy complements these findings, suggesting that students should be invited to share about their culture and



deepen their understanding of their identity in the classroom. In other words, these findings unexpectedly suggest that critical thinking should be the most central element in a unit promoting sustainable compassion for animals.

### **Description of the Project**

The project itself is a unit consisting of six lessons and a field trip. These lessons should be done over the course of six weeks, each week reviewing the learning from the previous lesson. The primary content standard that weaves through every lesson of the unit is Minnesota State Standard for Language Arts (Speaking) 0.8.1.1 - *Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.* Several additional standards are also addressed throughout the diverse activities integrated into the unit.

Each lesson takes a different approach to exploring our relationship to animals. The first lesson addresses the fluid nature of people's relationship to animals over time and across cultures, using some early Native Americans' use of the bison as an example. Students apply critical thinking, science, and language arts skills as they identify the parts of the bison's body and their use in early Native American communities. This lesson also introduces the larger concept of human relationship to animals that serves as an umbrella for all of the subsequent content. Lesson two invites students' wide-ranging beliefs about animals into the classroom. Now that students have the background recognition that beliefs about animals vary, they will explore that very idea in an immediate and hands on way. Based on family surveys, several classroom centers showcase the different roles

animals play for different families in our classroom community. After these two lessons focusing on our use of animals, lesson three draws animal voice into the picture, recognizing them as sentient stakeholders in these relationships. Through games and roleplay, students explore the concept of sentience, considering the idea of animals' capacity to feel and experience emotion. Lessons four and five look at three specific kinds of animals: pigs, dogs, and chickens. Through stories, videos, and dialogue, the class considers what they and their companion animals have in common with farmed animals, what makes them different, and the implications of the similarities and differences. The unit provides resources to support field trips to farm sanctuaries to make some of these classroom lessons more real and relevant to students. In the final lesson, the teacher presents students with an ethical dilemma related to animals in our school and guides them to make a decision about how to respond to the problem. This final lesson allows students to apply the critical thinking and communication skills they have developed to a real-world scenario, allowing the teacher to assess their learning and for students to develop a greater sense of agency and influence in their relationship to animals.

### **Limitations of the Project**

This project has several limitations in its current state. First, due to the brief window of time designated for this work, the unit is short. An expanded version of this unit may help further develop students' critical thinking skills and knowledge of our relationship to animals.

Second, many of the supplemental materials in this unit could benefit from more

professional design skills. My graphic design and PowerPoint skills are basic, and teachers and students alike may be more engaged with well-branded, aesthetically pleasing curricula.

Parental concerns may arise in some classrooms. Students may develop strong opinions one way or the other, and parents may believe these opinions are being “taught” or “promoted” by the teacher. For this reason, a parent note home is included in the supplemental materials of this curriculum. This letter explains that the focus of this unit is critical thinking and our relationship to non-human animals. It explains that no particular perspective is promoted and that all student and family opinions are welcome in the dialogue. Nonetheless, some teachers may be put off by the increased likelihood of parent concerns that may accompany this unit.

Another limitation of this unit is animal exposure. Having animals in public school classrooms with young children is often risky and difficult to arrange. At the same time, actual interaction with animals is shown to promote positive outcomes in humane education (Melson, 2001). Due to the constraints of time, setting, and resources, this unit includes only one real interaction with non-human animals in the optional field trip. Alternative educational settings -- animal shelters, summer camps, etc. -- may allow for more flexibility to find opportunities to spend time with animals.

### **Implications of the Project**

This project has explicitly addressed the gaps in research identified through the research question. Very few values and character education programs are standard-aligned. Additionally, most take an indoctrinating approach, ignoring the vast

diversity in our classrooms today. Without a culturally-responsive approach emphasizing critical thinking and accommodating diverse perspectives, students are less likely to engage in the content and develop sustained moral integrity. The research question -- *How can we teach compassion for animals in a culturally responsive manner?* -- has resulted in a curriculum that promotes critical thinking about our relationship to animals, invites all cultures to contribute to the learning, and empowers students as change makers.

Although this project has not yet been implemented, I have identified several possible impacts it may have for students and teachers who engage with it. First, teachers who have not previously applied humane education in their classrooms may see the broader value it holds. As they guide their students through this curriculum and cultivate empathy for animals, research suggests they may also see a change in students' treatment of one another (Beck & Katcher, 1996; McNicholas & Collis, 2001; Melson, 2001). This may cause some teachers to reconsider the value humane education can have in standard classrooms and beyond.

Second, students may feel empowered to voice their opinions about moral issues beyond compassion for animals. Students are rarely given the opportunity to engage with ethical thought at a young age. When they are, they are often told a right and wrong a way to do so. As they develop more advanced logic to support their beliefs and practice articulating them, they become better prepared to include their opinions in important discussions in our community. Children are often unaware their ethical decisions are even choices at all. As students consider the implications of animals as food, clothing, and

entertainment, they are presented with arguments for all sides of this debate. They have the opportunity to see that their choices matter and to know the impacts of their decisions.

### **Author's Reflection**

Writing this unit has provided a valuable opportunity to refine my sense of identity as an educator. Throughout the course of my time in the Master of Teaching program, I have had many opportunities to design lessons and few opportunities to create whole units. This unit demanded knowledge of various fields within education, including Understanding by Design, values education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and humane education. Additionally, it was essential for lessons to flow naturally, incorporate prior knowledge, and account for the developmental ability of kindergarteners. Weaving together all of these topics and themes proved challenging and rewarding. The intersection of these many themes and topics is the preceding unit. I am pleased to have an educational resource that fully embodies my values as an educator.

The development of the materials proved time consuming and difficult for me. I found that I was forced to wear many hats in the process of creating this unit – idea woman, child, graphic designer, educator, tech-wiz, animal advocate, and many more. As I move forward in my career, I would seek more collaboration on future projects. The limited timeframe of this project, as well as the individual ownership we were charged to have, made it difficult to seek out a team of experts for developing and implementing this unit. However, I see great value in a more collaborative approach to create units or curricula. This project allowed me to develop my technology and artistic skills in order to improve the quality of my unit. In the future, I could achieve an even higher quality of

work with the help of people more highly-trained in each of these areas.

As I continue in my career in education, I aim to integrate more humane education into my work. Whether in the classroom or in an alternative setting, I want animal advocacy to be a bigger piece of my job. The research and writing that has gone into this unit has proved an excellent starting point for fusing my interests in elementary classroom education and animal advocacy. This experience has also illuminated the areas where I am more knowledgeable and the areas where I lack the skills to advance my career. I see a great deal of continued area for growth in writing curriculum and expanding my strategies for teaching critical thinking. On the other hand, I notice I already feel comfortable integrating culturally relevant practices in all my work.

### **Conclusion**

As an educator, I share many values with the Hamline School of Education (HSE). Our shared values, reflected in Hamline's conceptual framework, are one of the reasons I decided to study at Hamline. It is my hope that this project reflects the tenets of this framework. In sum, there are several ways this project embodies our shared values.

First and foremost, this project is guided by culturally responsive pedagogy. All of the decisions about texts, visuals, activities, assessments, etc. were created with a great deal of attention to the diverse cultures and learning styles present in our classrooms. Hamline's first tenet in the conceptual framework is to promote equity in schools and society. By creating classrooms that reflect the diverse cultures and learning styles in our schools, we promote engagement, healthy identity development, and academic achievement. This curriculum leverages the social and cultural diversity in present in our

classrooms to enhance the quality of our learning experiences towards the advancement of all students.

Hamline's second tenet is to build communities of teachers and learners. Part of this element is to create environments that foster self-worth. This curriculum supports this tenet in two ways. First, it creates an inclusive environment by inviting all cultures to be shared and valued within the scope of our study of human-animal relationships. Second, research suggests that humane education results in improved empathy and social skills amongst people as well, arguably creating a more safe and welcoming classroom community. Additionally, Hamline's emphasis on building communities of teachers and learners implies a call to act as agents of change in our classrooms, schools, and communities. As we foster dialogue about our culture and our relationship to animals, this unit invites students to reconsider their relationship to animals and decide what kind of world they want for the animals. At the end of the unit, whatever their beliefs about animals may be, they have an opportunity to exercise their beliefs collectively and make a real-world decision that will impact animals at our school. These practical experiences allow students to exercise their agency as members of our society and prepare them to voice and act upon their beliefs in the future.

Another element of Hamline's conceptual framework is to Construct Knowledge. Culturally relevant pedagogy presupposes that bodies of knowledge are constructed and interpreted as this tenet suggests. Within the scope of this tenet, HSE recommends the application of best practices and the integration of technology in constructing knowledge. This unit applies a wide range of strategies for engaging learners of different styles and

interests. It applies technology through video, photos, PowerPoint, and more.

Finally, HSE's fourth tenet is Practice Thoughtful Inquiry and Reflection. This project is the manifestation of that practice, which I have developed over my three years at Hamline. I noticed in my teaching that values education was encouraged, but rarely aligned with standards. Such curricula rarely allowed room for difference and seemed to instruct without explanation or solicitation of independent thought. This project is the result of my reflection on this topic, seeking to fill a gap in culturally-responsive values education. As I administer this curriculum and share it with others, I will continue in this reflection process as I gather feedback and improve my work.



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## APPENDIX

The project artifact can be found at:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/0B1JC3LzgmqrGTWVXSVNfeGU3Qnc>.